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Mbuti

[ARCHERS]

[EP. 179-C]

the frequent moving of camp. According to Schebesta (1952, 80), the hut and the space in front are kept clean.

In leisure hours there are games and pastimes in which children and adults may take part, the dance being the most important. Schebesta (1952, 189 ff.) also mentions rope skipping; tug-of-war (often between men and women); *paiengbe*, an organized battle between men and women for a regime of plantains; and a form of gambling known as *mali*. The women and children have various string games as well.

The dance takes place on every possible occasion and is accompanied by drums made by the villagers. The emphasis in archer music (Schebesta, 1952, 190) is, as in the dance, on rhythm. Schebesta cites a number of musical instruments that are used by the archers for recreation, notably the drum, the musical bow, the sanza, the zither, and the *ruma* pipes.

Legend telling and mime are other important means of recreation mentioned by Schebesta (1952, 195). These, like most other recreational activities of adults, take place in the evening around the campfire. It is here, in any case, that the bachelors usually sleep (although Schebesta mentions the fact that there are bands in which bachelor huts are built), as do such of the married men as are under sexual taboo.

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Women are equally quick to ridicule the menfolk when there is justification.

This is also a time favored by youths for slipping off into the forest with their girl friends for some not very quiet lovemaking. Although lovemaking is not performed openly, no great attempt is made to conceal it. The general feeling is that if surprised in the act, one simply says hello (*kuribu*) politely and expects the intruder to continue on his way. Fathers, and mothers too, refer to the nuisance of a flirtatious son or daughter whom they might surprise in this way. The parent pretends to see nothing in such a case, and the youths claim, with more bravado than truth perhaps, not to be unduly disturbed unless they are making love to a relative.

Lovemaking generally takes place in the forest, though there is no fixed rule. It is thought somewhat exciting to make love in a hut, but not very healthy. There are preferences that individuals have for making love near a stream, or in a splash of sunlight, or in the dark depths of the forest. It is evidently a purely aesthetic consideration, and I have heard a number of youths who stated that the best time was while hunting. But moonlight evidently attracts a great number, and I have met several who talk, with great poetry, of the joys of masturbation when alone in the moonlight. On three rare occasions I have seen different individuals dancing, by themselves, in the moonlight and in the forest, away from the camp. The intimacy between the individual and the forest—one might almost say the act of making love to the forest—was expressed by one Mbuti who said, when I questioned him as to why he was dancing alone, that he was dancing with the forest, dancing with the moon. He then continued his dance with the utmost unconcern.

Not all lovemaking is quite so romantic, however, and when boys and girls are following a trail together, the procession may degenerate into a good-humored but undeniably lusty orgy. A boy may rip off a girl's outer bark cloth, if he can catch her, but he may never have intercourse with her without her permission. I know of no cases of rape, though boys often talk about their intentions of forcing reluctant maidens to their will.

There are no formal bachelor huts, but many camps have informal variants. They are sometimes built for an older youth by his mother, or they may be taken over by adolescent boys or girls when the occupant leaves for some reason. In such huts, and even out in the open, around the campfire, it is usual to see not only youths but also

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838 married men sleeping together. The two age groups do not mix, but
• 513 among themselves members of the same sex think nothing of sleeping close to each other and deriving mild sexual satisfaction from the physical contact. They state very carefully rules as to how to lie, with legs thrown backwards around the other's legs, or even around his hips or waist, and they say one may entwine legs while lying front to front, though it is not considered good to hold each other too closely with the arms. The thought of any sexual intercourse taking place,
[578] however, is greeted with apparent horror, and homosexuality is never alluded to except as a great insult, under the most dire provocation. There is, however, a dance in which the sexes are effectively reversed, and which is danced with the utmost humor, but the role of which
[535] I could never exactly determine. The dance, *ekokomea*, is dealt with later in the context in which it occurs; namely, at the time of the *molimo* festival.

837 If a considerable amount of sexual liberty is allowed the youths, a
834 fair amount is at least said to be taken by the younger married hunters. I have not, however, been able to record a single instance of a marital dispute involving the band that arose out of infidelity on either side. There are few restrictions on sexual intercourse, though the villagers state many on behalf of the Mbuti. The married hunters, as do the youths, regard the hunt as an opportune time for ac-
841 tivity of this kind. At menstruation, which is a time when a village
[842] woman is under the strictest ritual prohibitions, the Mbuti attitude is that it all depends on whether or not you want children, as this is when conception is most likely to take place. There are those who enjoy sex at this time, and those who find it distasteful. The only restriction is that a wife should inform her husband, or a girl her boy friend, that she is "with blood" so that he will know.

846 Immediately following childbirth is a rather vague period, some-
837 times stated as days, sometimes more grandiosely as years, when intercourse is forbidden. Unfortunately I was able to follow up only on three instances of childbirth, but in each of these the Mbuti fathers did exactly what they said they would do; two of them refrained from intercourse with their wives for about a year, during which time they flirted with as many girls as they liked, and did not deny open gossip
846 that they were "sleeping around." This is the generally accepted pat-
853 tern, the reason being given that a woman can only feed one child at a time, so she must not become pregnant again until her last child is weaned. This may be from one to three years. If during that time

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other wives, and they left without saying a word to him. As Kamaikan squatted over the fire, fanning it until it glowed red, I saw that she was pregnant, and I gathered from the look she cast after her two co-wives that her condition was the cause of some jealousy in the household.

Kenge delayed leaving, finding one excuse after another, until the sun was up. He then admitted that he had thought it silly to leave so early, when the forest was still wet and cold. He disappeared for an hour after that, and when he returned he was carrying a sleeping mat he had scrounged from a Negro (Pygmies generally sleep on leaves or sticks), a large bunch of plantains, and a cake of scented soap. He decided he could not carry my bundle as well as these things, so he told me I would have to carry my own. Anyway, he said, he wanted to leave his hands as free as possible in case he saw a bird or monkey he could shoot for dinner. He pulled the string of his bow and let it go with a loud twang, shooting an arm out in the direction the arrow would have gone, pointing to a tree top where a black-and-white Colobus monkey, idly scratching its stomach, gazed down at the scene below. I heard later that Kenge considered himself above acting as a porter; he apparently thought of that as a job fit only for people of the village, not people of the forest. Any self-respecting Pygmy carries his own load and no one else's.

When the sun was above the trees and the birds were singing and the village half empty, we crossed the road and walked through the Negro settlement, stopping for a quick last drink of palm wine, for no such luxuries are to be had in the forest. There were six of us in all: five Pygmy youths and myself.

The palm wine finished, they set off through the Negro plantations at such a pace that I almost had to run to keep up. At the edge of the plantations the forest was thick and matted, and the path entering it was narrow. The ground was still rough where saplings had been hacked off just above ground level, and on either side was

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THE MAKING OF CAMP LELO

For an hour the others lay around the fire, while I was pushed into a corner, and discussed where they would go to hunt the next day and which girls they would flirt with. They poked sleepily at the fire, sending up showers of sparks and filling the hut with smoke. In all the huts around us, families were chatting among themselves in a drowsy way, and occasionally some eavesdropper shouted a suitable comment, bringing a burst of laughter from all the nearby huts. The leaf walls keep out no sound at all, and anything said in an ordinary speaking voice can be heard four or five huts away. But before long the voices got sleepier and sleepier, and finally the only sounds were the chirping of crickets, the soft swishing of the already swollen Lelo, and the quiet falsetto of Makubasi as he sat outside his hut, all alone by a blazing fire. He held his baby son on his lap, and sang a lullaby, half to himself and half to the child. He was still singing when I went to sleep.

The next morning the camp was up at dawn, and before it was properly light there was hardly a soul left about—only old Tungana, sitting where his son Makubasi had sat the night before and like his son singing to the baby on his knee. Kenge said that some of the men had gone hunting early, because they needed a lot of meat to begin the molimo festival for Balekimito and they did not want to start until they had plenty of food. The rest of the men and women were out cutting the leaves and saplings needed to finish building the camp. We went to join them, not far off. The rest of the day we spent making the simple furniture of a Pygmy household.

Sticks lashed together and bound by vine thongs to a frame make one of the most uncomfortable beds in the world. The sticks themselves are comfortable enough, but for some reason these beds are made so that each end bends sharply upward and however you lie on it the effect is worse than being in a badly slung hammock. Some Pygmies don't bother with a bed but just put the sticks on the ground and lie on them, or sleep on dry leaves. Tables are made

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765 baby was too young to know what was going on, and so could not
533 tell the others what he saw; possibly simply because it did not matter very much anyway, for the Song was not only Beautiful, it was Good and Powerful.

It took me some time to realize just how important song was. That first night I just thought of it as being a beautiful sound. After we had eaten the food that had been offered to the molimo we sang again, and at one point the younger men got up and danced around the fire, excitedly, but without any of the frivolity that would come later. This was the first night of the molimo and everyone was on his best behavior. Then when the dancing was over we heard the trumpet again, and as we sang it sang back to us, getting farther and farther away. As it went it carried our song with it, deeper and deeper into the forest. Finally we could hear it no more, and only the echoes of our own voices came back to us from the night.

765 Not long after that old Moke stretched and yawned and said
533 that he was tired and that everyone should go to sleep and let him
• 513 sleep. But the younger men paid no attention and went on singing, so Moke resignedly joined in. But after another half-hour, when it was not very long before dawn, even the younger men decided to
[372] quit. Moke picked up the log he had been sitting on, the end of
[373] which was glowing in the hot ashes, and shuffled back to his hut, swinging the log so that it glowed brightly and lit his way across the camp. Manyalibo simply stretched out where he was, right beside the molimo fire, and went to sleep there. A number of youths did likewise, their hunting nets making comfortable beds, but I went back to my hut. I found Kenge there, fast asleep. He was on my bed, wrapped my blanket, snoring contentedly, and the hut was filled with sm...e from the fire he had lit beside him.

765 In spite of the hunting that had to be done each day, the men
533 sang in this way every night. And every night we looked to see who
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term which could be translated as either "brother" or "sister," and anyone younger is "child," though more often they are just called by name. In this way a Pygmy camp is much less formal than most African societies, where there are not only different terms of address and reference for different degrees of relationship, but also correspondingly different modes of behavior that are enforced at all times.

During the day one Pygmy camp looks much like another. The sun filters down through the trees and brightens the camp with shafts of spiraling light as it catches the columns of smoke drifting lazily upward. This is what makes a camp look so full of life at midday, even when most people are out on the hunt and those that have stayed behind are dozing in the shade of their little leaf huts. The light has a life of its own, and after it has danced down the coils of blue smoke it seems to leap from place to place on the leafy floor of the camp as the trees sway in the breeze high above. And when you listen you hear life in myriad forms all around—birds, monkeys, bees; the rustling of a nearby stream and the never-ending voice of the forest itself. It continually whispers assurances that all is well, that the forest is looking after its children.

In a village the heat of day is unbearably, suffocatingly oppressive, but in the forest it is just warm enough to make you want to stretch out and bask in the dancing, shady sunlight, like other living creatures. But the Pygmies have learned from the animals around them to doze with one eye open, and a sleepy midday camp can become filled in a minute with shouts and yells and tearful protestations as a baby, crawling around this warm, friendly world, gets into a bed of hot ashes, or a column of army ants. In a moment he will be surrounded by angry adults and given a sound slapping, then carried unceremoniously back to the safety of a hut. It does not matter much which hut, because as far as the child is concerned all adults are his parents or grandparents. They are all equally likely to slap him for doing

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women gathered around, chattering away gaily and asking for news of the village.

The girls were Amina, daughter of an important BaBira subchief, and her cousin. Her father was hoping, she said, that she might be allowed to stay for a few days and bring him back some meat. She obviously knew the Pygmies well, because without waiting to be asked she distributed the plantains. She said she would keep the manioc flour until the meat began to come in. Apparently she was well liked, because as soon as people heard of her presence they came over to shake her hand, in the manner of villagers, grasping each other's wrists. Kenge told me all about her, and said that her father was one of the least animal-like villagers. He asked me which of the two girls I thought looked the more attractive. I said Amina, without a doubt. She was the most beautiful girl I had seen in a long time; the BaBira are by no means noted for their good looks. Amina was tall and a warm brown in color. She carried herself with the inborn grace of Bantu women; her eyes were deep and thoughtful; her expression was kind and gentle. Yes, she was certainly the more beautiful of the two. Kenge nodded thoughtfully and changed the conversation.

That night I sat up late with the men, and when I went back to my hut I was surprised not to see any bachelors sleeping on the floor as they usually did. But three logs were placed beside the bed and were glowing cheerfully. I sat down on the edge of the bed and found, as I had expected, that Kenge had curled up in my blanket. He was considerate enough, on such occasions, not to take my blanket onto the floor, but rather to take half of the bed. So I crawled in beside him and was about to say something when I realized that the body beside me was considerably taller than Kenge, and very differently shaped. It was Amina.

It was a difficult moment, but I could see the whole situation at once. I had become the center of a nice political maneuver. The

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765 534 lage, and I heard leaves being ripped off roofs and the dried mud beaten from walls.

765 533 781 [513] There was a subtle change of atmosphere, and a tremendous air of expectancy. By their insistent singing the older men seemed to be trying to avert some disaster, as did the youths by their dancing. Moke allowed nobody to sleep or rest except for a very brief spell when he kept half a dozen men singing while the others dozed as best they could around the fire. Then he woke us up and goaded us all into singing harder than ever. The molimo had left and was evidently playing havoc in the Negro village. But as we sang it came sweeping back into the camp from behind Ekianga's house.

765 781 535 534 372 The two fire-dancers in front sent showers of sparks up into the air and onto the ground. The molimo made straight for the central fire. It knocked us aside—even old Tungana—and slowly and deliberately it trampled through the fire, scattering it to all sides.

The men who had been sitting were on their feet at once, and hurriedly threw the scattered logs back into the center and joined the dancers in bringing life back to the fire. But the molimo was insistent, and the next time all the men joined with it. Reluctantly at first, then sharing the inevitability of the occasion they too danced and stamped among the flaming logs until there was nothing left but glowing coals. As the pace of the dance increased, the embers were scattered wider and wider, until the whole of the village seemed to be carpeted with winking red eyes. The molimo was once again blowing martial blasts, and the men accompanied it with a deep, rhythmic chant. All except a few of the elders followed it on its last tour of the camp, slow and majestic, tramping out the fire of life until there was only one glowing ember left. I saw Moke sadly sit down on the ground beside it, pick it up in his hands and fondle it. [276] He took a cigarette butt from behind his ear and lighted it with the coal. He put the coal carefully back on the ground, stood up and stepped on it until it too was extinguished. Then he turned his back on us all and disappeared into his hut.

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the Pygmies came in to eat. The men came in and sat down and ate without ceremony while their patrons watched hungrily. But they were not related to Balekimito, so they could not partake. Women, too, were excluded, according to the village rules of the game, but I saw a number of dishes quietly slipped to one side, and shortly afterward all the women were enjoying their own feast, concealed behind the elima hut.

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The villagers asked if everyone had ritually bathed, to wash off the taint of death, and everyone politely said yes. The villagers then asked if the Pygmies had any meat to spare, and the Pygmies equally politely said no. They had given it all to the molimo, they said, and to this there was no answer, for it was a very creditable thing to do, in village eyes. I bought a large quantity of palm wine, however, and this mollified to some extent the strained feelings of the patrons. They knew they were being deceived and cheated, yet they felt they were only doing what was right in trying to impose their beliefs and practices on the forest savages who had no culture of their own. If the forest spirits struck the Pygmies down for not having heeded their patrons, for not having performed all the necessary rituals as they had been told, then it was not the fault of the villagers. They drank their fill and departed.

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Once the Negroes had gone we all tried to get some sleep, for it was late afternoon and we had had no rest. But for three months the men had sung and danced and feasted every night and for three months the women and children had been sent to bed early, forbidden to come out and take part in the festivities except for the dance of the old woman. Now the molimo was over, and the women took advantage of the fact. After all, an elima had begun, and that was as important to the women as the molimo was to the men. At dusk all the girls of the elima came out of their hut. Their beautiful young bodies shone and glistened with the palm oil that had been carefully rubbed into the skin, making them even more alluring to

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THE WORLD OF THE VILLAGE

The familiar night sounds of the forest were replaced by the cries of drunks coming home from a dance at the nearby Hotel de Bière, where an antique Victrola ground out records of the African version of the Calypso, imported from the coast. In the Negro village there were constant fights—not the wordy fights of the Pygmies, but good old-fashioned fisticuffs. These were likely to occur at any time of night, depending on how late it was when an outraged husband, returning from a rendezvous with his current girl friend, reached his own hut to find his wife in bed with someone else.

In our small Pygmy village the fires were all brought inside at night, and the smoke helped to keep away the mosquitoes. The doors were pulled tight shut, and nobody slept out in the open. Just an occasional murmured comment on the noise made by "those black savages" was all that was heard, none of the usual cheerful gossip that used to go on every night until, one by one, the hunters fell asleep.

But in the very dead of night I could hear the sound of crickets from the forest, reminding me that it was, after all, not so far away, and all around us. Sometimes when the moon was full I wandered around the sleeping village, to the edges of the plantations. There the forest stood up into the night like a great black wall, surrounding this small circle, cut so ineffectively out of its very heart. It rose up all around, confident in the knowledge that it would soon claim its own and grow back more thickly than ever, where it had been cut. There were several such abandoned villages nearby, not long abandoned; yet already the forest towered above them in the unsmiling triumph of inevitability. The forest destroyed everything but its own. Only against the machine age, which had barely reached it, was it powerless.

In the very early hours the forest made itself felt, but close as it was it faded far away with the coming of dawn. The morning sounds of cocks crowing, goats bleating, and the elephants of the Station de